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Bilingual Education: An Action Research Agenda for the Nineties

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This article proposes an action research agenda based on research activities that are being conducted in bilingual and English as a second language classrooms and whose results are being implemented in instructional activities, teacher training, and other research projects. Action research is considered a cooperative and concurrent process which facilitates reflection and action in the schooling of potentially English proficient (PEP) students and which is conducted by researchers (usually university professors, specialists, theoreticians) and practitioners (usually principals, teachers, curriculum specialists, staff developers). Action research allows practitioners to become coresearchers, to conduct research, and to implement research results in their district, school, or

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classroom (Lieberman, 1986; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1990; Tikunoff, 1985).

This agenda is based on the premise that school districts with language minority students, universities serving training needs of those districts, state education agencies, research centers, multifunctional resource centers, the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs, the National Association for Bilingual Education, the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages organization, and other relevant organizations and institutions can participate in cooperative and joint research. Especially important to such endeavors are the contributions of teachers and administrators in public and private schools who are closest to what is going on in the schooling of PEP students. No one group holds a monopoly on good ideas to design research and on hard work to conduct research. Coalitions of practitioners and theoreticians may be particularly effective. However, theoreticians must bear in mind that a principal and teachers in a school will probably provide some of the most critical information about what is going on in the areas of bilingualism, biculturalism, and bilingual education in the classroom (Diaz, Moll, & Mehan, 1986; Montero-Sieburth, & Perez, 1987; Valadez & Patino Gregoire, 1990).

Action research can also mean that both practitioners and theoreticians are researchers, whether they are university professors, classroom teachers, specialists, administrators, or students. Classroom teachers conduct research as they experiment in the classroom, trying out instructional approaches that may or may not work and following these approaches with variations or alternative means. The research orientation needs to come as much from the theoretician as from the practitioner in a coordinated effort between those two (Cazden, 1983; Freeman, 1989; Padilla, 1990; Trueba, 1988).

All bilingual programs—not just the innovative, demonstration, or excellence programs—can integrate a research component. School districts, in close partnership and coordination with previously described research partners, must have a role in planning the research agenda in such a way that research findings can affect not only the program but bilingual programs in general (Minaya-Rowe, 1990; Secada, 1990). This close coordination is needed in order to achieve the following goals: (a) articulate the principles—pedagogical, linguistic, etc.—on which the districts are operating; (b) determine the research needs of the districts; and (c) design research with some degree of confidence. However, the autonomy of individual researchers must also be protected (Schensul, 1985).

The partnership between school districts and research partners must be based on a two-way relationship. For example, a school district with commitment to bilingual education for Hispanics wants students who go through the system to emerge as fluent speakers of Spanish and English. But that district may also have

periodic evaluation needs related to funding sources. In this scenario, in which evaluation and research can be thought of as closely related, the research institutions can do the following: (a) help the district achieve its short-term goals by answering the basic questions related to reporting purposes; and, at the same time, (b) conduct some innovative basic or process-oriented research through the establishment of a long-range research agenda (Cummins, 1990; Ogbu, 1987; Valadez & Patino Gregoire, 1990).

What basic principles can be followed to delineate action research activities?
A review of the existing literature reveals the need for research that meets the following criteria:

(1) They are of a longitudinal nature in addition to a cross-sectional one. All individuals and institutions who can make research contributions need to conduct short- and long-range or longitudinal research. Cross-sectional studies provide certain kinds of insights. In order to collect information and be able to take a retrospective look at the cumulative result of a child's emerging bilingualism, researchers must make a commitment to follow children from the time they enter kindergarten beyond graduation from secondary school. Some of these children may have chosen not to enter a liberal arts college, choosing instead to enroll in a vocational education program, another form of higher education, or none at all. The researcher's main goal must be to look at the cumulative effects of educational and social experiences of students becoming bilingual over long periods of time as they are involved in different interactions in the community, home, school, and other settings (Jacob & Jordan, 1987; Tucker, 1990).

(2) They explore the diversity of methodological approaches and the complimentary roles to be played between qualitative (e.g., ethnographic) research and quantitative (e.g., the more empirically driven) research. Researchers need to bring together both qualitative as well as quantitative studies; for example, to design research that includes the observation of general patterns, trends, and tendencies as well as minute details of language behavior usage of children, one-to-one, in various and diverse settings (Cazden, 1983). The information collected does not apply only to these particular children, but higher-order generalizations can be made with the data obtained. Quantification provides a type of credibility but often remains unconvincing unless supported by adequate qualitative, descriptive statements (Erickson, 1984; Pelto & Pelto, 1978).

(3) They look at the needs of a bilingual population based on a diversity of disciplinary involvement. Researchers can consider several interdisciplinary

angles in order to best use their resources. For example, a research project within the field of developmental psycholinguistics may be related to sociolinguistics or child development to understand the totality and diversity of the development of bilingualism in children (Cummins, 1986, 1989). Psychologists, linguists, anthropologists, and sociologists need to talk to each other about the phenomena they are studying. They can pave the way for the development of interdisciplinary perspectives in the conception of a research project. Their writing can promote communication through the prompt publication of research findings (Freeman, 1989; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1990).

(4) They contain not only classroom interactions but the broader context of the home and the community. Researchers need to balance micro-oriented studies in terms of the type and implications of the research with studies that go beyond the classroom. What happens in the classroom in very specific interactions is only one aspect. The understanding of that interaction does not account for what happens in the broader context of the school and outside of the school. For example, there is an urgent need to conduct research to provide alternative understandings and explanations to the so-called academic failure or failure of adjustment of language minority students in the school system. Research results have sometimes been used to their maximum extent only because they can be controlled methodologically (Cummins, 1990; Hakuta, 1990; Trueba, 1988). In doing so, researchers have penalized themselves by looking only at certain aspects of the phenomenon in question. The alternative must be to look at the classroom interaction, the school, and the community. Research needs to provide answers to questions such as: Why does a child, who operates very competently in English in the community (e.g., a child who goes to the store and makes transactions, or a child who serves as English interpreter to his monolingual parents), move into another context—the school—and freeze when he attempts math in English, then switches to his native language? Classroom interaction and school work need to be considered in the context of effective communication, the culture, and the cognitive processes all associated in day-to-day interpsychological kinds of interactions. Action researchers cannot disentangle the acquisition of social skills from the acquisition of knowledge per se. Sometimes PEP students are put into a straitjacket when the cognitive structures they have to acquire are imposed on them.

Action research studies that are of a longitudinal nature, that bring together qualitative and quantitative research, that consider an interdisciplinary involvement, that balance the educational context with the context of the home and the community, and that are based on the constant interaction between pure and applied research in the phenomenon of bilingualism provide specific

answers to research questions and clearer pictures and insights about many of the following concerns:

(a) approaches to equity issues—e.g., to empower bilingual instruction in order to challenge the societal power structure of English-speaking America (Cummins, 1989); (b) approaches to policy practices—e.g., implications for the assessment of PEP students' achievement for the validity of certain kinds of instruments; (c) considerations for the role of the federal government to build continuity in research efforts. A look at federally-funded research of the last two decades points to a change of efforts because of a change of federal administration (Secada, 1990; Tucker, 1990). Continuity needs to be built with limited resources that may or may not be from the federal government; (d) the significance of research studies conducted by action researchers who may not be well-known but who are working at the heart of the problem and are committed to doing a good job; (e) coordination of nationwide research efforts ensuring that research is not unnecessarily duplicated and that money is spent on research projects that are practical, that tell us something we did not know before we started.

What kinds of research activities or areas need to be investigated? Despite the interrelated nature of most research and the great amount of overlapping, it is possible to organize research topics around areas of research. I have selected sixteen areas of research with resulting research components, research activities, or both. The research needs are those found in cursory reviews of the literature which might be of common knowledge to practitioners and theoreticians. Some were discussed at the 1990 OBEMLA (Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs) National Research Symposium on Limited English Proficient Students Issues. Others were discussed at bilingual education research symposia at the 1990 and 1991 NABE (National Association for Bilingual Education) conferences. Still others were discussed at the 1990 and 1991 AERA (American Educational Research Association) conferences. This selection is by no means complete and needs to be reviewed periodically. The following figure includes the sixteen areas in need of research, a sample of research components, and research activities.

Figure 1. Areas in need of research with corresponding activities.

Area	Activities
1. Language, with these components: (a) simultaneous and successive	(i) acquisition and development of native languages other than English

processes of first and second
language acquisition

    (ii) acquisition and development of
English as a second language

    (iii) development or underdevelopment
of bilinguals

    (iv) differences between learning English
and speaking English in a minority
community context

(b) language teaching

    (i) relationship of comprehensional and
communicative competence in light
of Krashen's theoretical contribu-
tions: the comprehensible input
hypothesis, the affective filter
hypothesis, the acquisition-learning
distinction, and the monitor model

    (ii) content-based language instruction,
applications of sheltered English

    (iii) whole language approaches

    (iv) cooperative learning strategies

    (v) school and nonschool strategies

(c) language proficiency

    (i) definition of language proficiency

    (ii) relation of language proficiency to
academic achievement in light of
Cummins' theoretical proposals: the
common underlying proficiency, the
continua of language proficiency,
the interdependence hypothesis, the
threshold levels of language
proficiency

(d) biliteracy and skill transfer

(i) native language literacy

(ii) development of writing skills in L_1 and L_2

(iii) transfer of skills beyond the linguistic levels into cognitive levels

2. Assessment, with these components

(a) language dominance and proficiency testing

(i) improvement of language dominance and language proficiency instruments

(ii) assessment of comprehensional (receptive) and communicative (productive) competence

(iii) right and/or left hemispheric processing with success in L_2 acquisition

(iv) relation to levels of instruction

(b) achievement testing

(i) more relevance to language minority students

(ii) characteristics in the content areas

(iii) development of measures of achieved cognitive skills

(c) identification criteria

(i) academic and affective indicators considered as exit criteria

(ii) criteria for PEP students who are language disabled

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3. Special education

    (i) incidence of PEP students by categories of exceptionality

    (ii) parents' rights in terms of special education for their children

    (iii) ways to deal with students who will never leave the program

4. Curriculum: development and implementation

    (i) integrated curriculum by levels of instruction and language background

    (ii) curriculum tied to action research

    (iii) ethnic arts curriculum linked to contributions of PEP students' oral folk culture

5. Teacher training, with these components

    (a) staff development

    (i) teachers and administrators: mainstream awareness, transitioning to the mainstream program, reading in the native language, second language teaching strategies

    (ii) content and performance as preservice and inservice training components

    (b) institutionalization process

    (i) role of staff development in teacher training programs at institutions of higher education (IHE)

    (ii) participatory conditions of school districts in the articulation of IHE's

	training programs
6. Culture	(i) ways to encourage biculturalism
	(ii) relationship to language acquisition and development and learning styles
	(iii) use of oral folk culture to improve academic abilities and linguistic proficiencies
7. Slow learners	(i) effects of schooling on slow learners
	(ii) bilingual slow learners compared to monolingual slow learners
	(iii) factors affecting learning (socioeconomic, sociolinguistic)
	(iv) bilingual vocational experiences to improve motivation in disadvantaged young adults and adults
8. Migration	(i) patterns of specific linguistic minority communities
	(ii) social class variation of migration
	(iii) occupational mobility in relation to family stress and parent-child relationship
9. Research Centers Studies, with these components	
(a) Significant Bilingual Instructional Features	(i) applications of results at the state and local levels

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(b) Center for Language Education and Research

(ii) conditions under which research findings are associated with good outcomes

(c) Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning

(iii) effects of findings for staff development and teacher training

10. Dropouts

(i) causal factors for dropping out of school

(ii) components of a dropout prevention program

(iii) impact of dropout prevention program in the affective domain

11. Mainstreaming

(i) range of variation of mainstreaming from one school district to the other
(ii) performance of mainstreamed students after one, two, and more years in the regular program
(iii) performance of students who are never mainstreamed

12. Microcomputers

(i) use in the academic areas and in language development

(ii) access in bilingual programs

(iii) benefits of computer programming

13. Remedial education

(i) interplay between bilingual education and remediation

(ii) characteristics of a remediation component

	(iii) construction of remediation materials
14. Bilingualism and cognitive development	(i) relationship between bilingualism and cognitive development
	(ii) bilingualism linked to enhancement of cognitive flexibility and creativity
15. Laws and regulations	(i) implementation in the bilingual classroom
	(ii) characteristics of language policies in the nation
16. Evaluation	(i) characteristics of evaluation models
	(ii) design and development of a model to meet characteristics of a specific school population

Implementation of action research activities. Action researchers must consider the theoretical principles that have been consistently supported in the literature. They need to use this information as a basis for generating other studies and for interpreting the data gathered for a specific study. The specification of research activities in bilingual education cannot obscure the fact that there are issues for which some valid answers already exist: Those issues may have already been studied in a variety of different contexts based on theories that predict outcomes of bilingual education programs under a variety of different conditions.

Action research needs to be based on what is known in bilingual education not only from the point of view of planning further studies but also of defending the principles underlying bilingual education (Crawford, 1989; Hakuta, 1990; Langer et al., 1990). Research outcomes must, then, be stated with authority because they have been validated across a variety of different contexts. Action research needs to be based on the concept that nothing is as practical as a good theory, and facts must be unified with it for interpretation and general application (Lieberman, 1986; Tikunoff, Ward, & Griffin, 1979).

A pool of knowledge that accounts for research conducted or being conducted

in bilingual bicultural education needs to be disseminated. Researchers can make full use of the resources that are available from the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, the Center for Applied Linguistics, the Evaluation and Assessment Centers, the Multifunctional Resource Centers, the National Association for Bilingual Education, the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Association, and other research institutions. Furthermore, with the coordination and partnerships among school districts, state education departments, universities, and other relevant sources, a great amount of information on available research on bilingual education could be collected and disseminated at regional, state, and local levels.

Action researchers must consider experiences that have been conducted in other settings with other ethnic groups and different languages. A theory can predict certain outcomes; the validity of that theory is precisely how well it can account for the data under different conditions. In bilingual/bicultural education programs in the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa, theoretical principles are operating across languages. For example, students all over the world gain in the acquisition and transfer of language skills because of bilingual instruction (Chamot, 1988; Cummins, 1989, 1990; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1984, 1990; Zentella, 1988).

Action researchers need to examine the principle that bilingual education is an enriching phenomenon—cognitively, socially, linguistically, culturally (Cummins, 1981, 1989; Hakuta, 1986, 1990). Research reveals evidence that PEP students who are instructed through two languages—for example, Spanish and English, Navajo and English—do at least as well in the acquisition and development of academic skills in English as equivalent students in an all-English program (August & Garcia, 1988; Holm & Holm, 1990; Krashen, 1988, 1990; Willig, 1985). Research has also shown that students who are instructed in Spanish or in French—do not lose out in the acquisition of native language skills. There is a lag in the development of these skills until formal English Language Arts is introduced, usually around grades 2 or 3, but then there is a rapid shift and gain in English skills (Lindholm & Dolson, 1988; Swain & Wong Fillmore, 1984).

Action researchers need to be sensitive to the kinds of changes that are occurring at the broader sociopolitical level (Cummins, 1989; Hornberger, 1990; Secada, 1990; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1990). They need to conduct research to expand the potential of bilingual education through enrichment programs which include minority and majority students (Cummins, 1989, 1990; Lindholm & Dolson, 1988; Rhodes, Crandall, & Christian, 1990; Tucker, 1990). The programs' goal would be bilingualism—that is, full development of first and

second language skills. Action researchers need to test and evaluate some of these concepts and determine what principles are operating within these contexts.

The reader has to recognize the need for more research on conceptual input into how certain categories of research overlap, how they are related theoretically, and if they can be combined into one research category. For example, language assessment relates to language dominance, language proficiency, and language disability. A conceptual clarification is needed as to what these issues are. Both practitioners and theoreticians need to clarify these concepts to determine where the overlap starts and where it ends.

Finally, regional and state educational institutions—such as Departments of Education, school districts, and universities—can create annual research incentive programs to support and reward collaborative research initiatives through competition for small grant research proposals submitted by practitioners and theoreticians. The formation of an Ad Hoc Committee would be desirable with members of the community, action researchers, and representatives from the educational institutions. The committee's tasks would be three-fold: (a) to seek funding from sources such as private business; (b) to set the criteria for evaluating proposals; and, (c) to evaluate the research findings and applications. Proposals approved for funding will aim to research specific areas and to conduct research activities to meet the educational institution's objectives. The proposals will be evaluated in light of the research approach used, the scholarly quality, the significance of its contribution and applicability to the knowledge in the area of bilingual education.

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